

green-eyed monster by emmaofmisthaven

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Summary:

It takes Eleven a year to find her way out of the Upside Down.

Her powers come back to her slowly, like a buzzing at the back of her mind. Softly at first, until it gets louder and louder, until she feels like herself (whatever that means) all over again. She waits a little while longer before she tries to open a crack between the worlds. Her first attempt is a disaster, and it takes her three more weeks to recover. Her second attempt opens a portal so small she can only slip her hand through it, and nothing more – the sun is hot on her skin on the other side, and she cries herself to sleep that night.

Third time is the charm.

green-eyed monster

Author's Note:

that season 2 teaser, amirite?????

It takes Eleven a year to find her way out of the Upside Down. In the first few weeks she is so weak, she can barely stand up without dizziness making her sick in the stomach until, a few seconds later, her frail legs give up under the weight of her body. When she brushes her fingers against the soft fabric of her (now ruined) dress, she feels each and every one of her ribs, the jug of her hip. Even her cheeks feel sharper under her hands, but she doesn't touch her face often – not with dirty caked under her nails and blood sipping between the cracks of her dry skin.

The food helps. Eleven isn't certain who brings it to her at first, and it takes her months to figure it out until she hears the echo of Hopper's gruff voice. 'Hope you're still there, kiddo.' Eleven screams and screams until her voice is hoarse, but she never hears Hopper again so she gives up. The food appears every day at the same time, and she learns to wait for it. Mostly meat and pasta, sometimes something else, and Eggos. Always Eggos that she wolfs down in a few bites. She chokes on her food until it sits uncomfortably in her stomach, but each meal makes her stronger, better, until she can no longer feel the ribs beneath her dress, until her knees stop trembling when she stands up.

Her powers come back to her slowly, like a buzzing at the back of her mind. Softly at first, until it gets louder and louder, until she feels like herself (whatever that means) all over again. She waits a little while longer before she tries to open a crack between the worlds. Her first attempt is a disaster, and it takes her three more weeks to recover. Her second attempt opens a portal so small she can only slip her hand through it, and nothing more – the sun is hot on her skin on the other side, and she cries herself to sleep that night.

Third time is the charm.

She forces her way through the crack in a tree, cringing at the sticky

stuff in her hair and on her face, until she falls on the ground on the other side. She doesn't want to open her eyes at first, scared. Her knees are in the mud, and her fingers wrap around dead leaves, a cold wind coming to play with her tangled hair. The air is fresh and crisp, unlike the air in the Upside Down – it was hot and suffocating and she often choked on the white stuff that falls from the sky.

When she opens her eyes, she recognizes the forest around her, and a sob gets stuck in her throat. 'Home,' she would say if she could speak right now. Instead, she forces herself to stand up, and looks around her. The forest is familiar, but she doesn't know exactly where she is – familiar but big. She doesn't recognize the trees behind Joyce's house, which is a shame. It would have been so much easier to find Joyce and hide between her arms. Joyce would know what to do next.

She starts walking instead. One foot in front of the other, bare against the cold ground – she lost her shoes to the Upside Down a long time ago – until she finds a road. It happens a while later, Eleven careful to hide herself behind a tree. Maybe Papa is still out there, looking for her. She doesn't want to be found – she knows what will happen next if they find her.

But it's not Papa she hears coming. Her breath gets caught in her throat when she recognizes the voices – one particularly loud compared to the other – and then, when she peeks from the side of the tree, the figures down the road.

"Dustin," she whispers to herself as she points to the louder boy. And then, "Will," then again, "Lucas," and finally, her voice softer, around a smile, "Mike."

But her finger points someone else altogether, and Eleven frowns. Five, not four like she expected. She frowns some more before, slowly, quietly, she moves closer to them, still hidden by the trees around her. She doesn't recognize the fifth person – it's a girl she's never seen before, her hair into a short ponytail and her clothes looking like what the boys are wearing. Not like Nancy, not like Eleven's pink dress, but jeans and sneakers and a t-shirt with the space ship toy Dustin wanted her to keep in the air painted on it.

The girl stands close to Mike, laughing, and Eleven can't ignore the weight that drops in her stomach at the sight. She's pretty – not as pretty as Nancy, but still pretty. Pretty enough for Mike to like her. For Mike to take her to the Snow Ball, maybe, and Eleven bites the inside of her cheek at the thought. Her powers hum under her skin as she tastes anger on her tongue, and she forces herself to calm down. Her powers are for the bad men, no one else. To protect, not to attack. She closes her eyes to calm down, even if it takes long seconds before she can breathe normally again.

When she opens her eyes, Will is staring right back at her, and she gasps.

“Guys?” she hears him say, hesitant. “Guys, you need to check this.”

And then it all happens at once – first Dustin hugs her, and then Lucas joins in, and the next thing she knows Eleven falls down with both boys on top of her as they yell too many questions at once. That it, before Mike pushes them both away from her, grabbing the collar of their shirts and pulling, and then nothing else matters because Mike's arms are around her, squeezing like he wants to steal the breath away from her. Eleven holds on just as tightly.

“You're back, you're back, you're back,” he whispers to her ear.

“How are you back?” Dustin asks, never one to shy away from answers.

Mike lets go of her, just so he can look at her when she replies, all of them staring at her. Eleven opens her mouth, so overwhelmed that no word comes out, and decides to just shrug instead. Easier that way. Not that the boys seem to mind either way, still fretting and still asking more questions, while Will smiles kindly at her – a look passes between them, an understanding of some kind. And then Mike is helping her up, and Eleven doesn't let go of his hand once she's standing again. She holds on, afraid to let go.

“So you're Eleven.”

Eleven turns around in a startle, facing the other girl. From up close, she notices a bruise purpling on her jaw and, with the grin she offers,

her chipped tooth. Eleven takes a step forward instinctively, putting herself between the other girl and Mike. She misses the way Lucas raises his eyebrows, or Dustin elbowing Will's side excitedly. She doesn't miss the way Mike squeezes her fingers, as to reassure her.

"El, this is Max. She was helping us find you."

Eleven finds herself hesitating, before she deflates like a balloon, no longer wary about the other girl when she has other things in mind. She turns toward Mike, surprised and hopeful. "Find me?"

"Of course!" He takes a step closer to her. "We're still friends, remember? Friends save each other from the Upside Down."

"More often than we would like," Will adds softly, but with a smile.

"Friends," Eleven echoes. She smiles, too.

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They decide that the best way to go about it is to find Joyce. She will know what to do, Will tells her, only Joyce isn't home when they arrive. Instead, it's Jonathan who opens the door, eyes widening when they settle on Eleven. And of course, Jonathan calls Nancy, who decides that the best thing to do is to call Hopper, and by the time Joyce is back from work her house is full of teenagers chaperoned by one very confused chief of police.

Nancy comes bearing clothes, and she helps Eleven clean up – she scrubs her hair until they no longer smell like the Upside Down, free of its sticky stuff, and help her find clothes that fit. They settle on something simple, tight jeans that go all the way up to Eleven's belly button and a soft pink t-shirt ('Just like your dress!' Nancy exclaims happily, and Eleven grins), with white sneakers not unlike the one she wore the first time around.

It takes more time for Nancy to work on the knots in Eleven's hair, now brushing her shoulders. She works slowly, with a comb and with

her fingers. Jonathan finds them sitting on the bathroom floor, Nancy sitting behind Eleven with her legs on each side on her body, and tells them he was just checking, they've been at it for more than half an hour now, and people are getting restless. He closes the door softly on his way out, offering a smile to Nancy as he goes.

Eleven frowns at the door, before she asks tentatively, “Jonathan – your friend?”

Nancy's fingers still in her hair, and she inhales sharply. For a moment, Eleven is afraid she did something wrong and upset the other girl – the last thing she wants is for Nancy to be mad with her – but then Nancy lets out a small laugh and goes back to brush her hair.

“Can you keep a secret?” Eleven nods eagerly – secrets between friends are sacred, that much she remembers. “He's my boyfriend, but nobody knows yet.”

“Boyfriend?” The word is foreign on Eleven's tongue, and she frowns once more. “What's *boyfriend*?”

Nancy laughs one more time, a little louder. “It's when you really like someone. You go to the movies, and you hold hands, and you even kiss. Because you like them very much.”

“And you go to the Snow Ball?”

Nancy is silent for a moment, and Eleven doesn't dare turning away to look at her face. It feels like an important moment, a life lesson she will want to remember for a very long while. She still remembers what Mike told her, about liking someone more than a sister – does Mike like her like a boyfriend? Or does he like Max like a boyfriend?

“Yes, and you can go to the Snow Ball,” Nancy confirms, knocking the air out of Eleven's lugs. “But you can do a lot of other things too. It's quite fun, really.”

She brushes Eleven's hair one last time, the comb running smoothly through her untangled locks, before she braids it simply and declares the job done. Eleven stands up and looks at herself in the mirror –

her cheeks are pink now, and clean, and little strands of brown hair come to frame her face.

“Pretty.”

Nancy hugs her from behind, her chin on Eleven’s shoulder. “The prettiest.”

Nancy will always be the prettiest, in Eleven’s mind, but she does appreciate the compliment. Even more so when she gets out of the bathroom and the boys start gasping and being overly too dramatic about her change of clothes. Joyce smiles kindly, and brushes her knuckles against Eleven’s cheek in a comforting motion, before she asks her if she is hungry.

Eleven finds herself with a glass of milk in her hands before she even notices Mike staring at her, silent and red in the cheeks. He shakes his head when he notices her staring back, as if chasing the thoughts from his head, then moves closer to Dustin and Hopper and joins in on their conversation. It leaves Eleven staring at the space where he was only seconds before, lost for words and thoughts.

That’s when Max hops her way by her side, all grins and curious eyes. Eleven’s frown deepens, but it doesn’t seem to deter the other girl. She locks her arm with Eleven’s, ignoring how Eleven’s entire body stills at the physical contact. She forces herself to breathe, to ignore the sparkles coming to life beneath her skin. Max is not one of the bad men, she is a friend. Friends are important. You keep friends safe.

“The guys told me a lot about you,” she starts.

Eleven can only reply, “oh,” because she has no idea if it is a good or a bad thing. She has no idea what the boys could say about her that is worth telling, beside the fact that they were friends – she killed for them. It’s not really a tale worth bragging about. She isn’t really proud of it, even if she knew she had no choice. It was either the bad men or the boys and – well, she will pick the boys, always.

“They say you were in the Laboratory. Before.”

It takes Eleven a few seconds to connect the dots. And then, “Bad place.”

Max nods knowingly, before she dives in. “Where you alone? Was there – anyone, with you? A little boy?”

Eleven shakes her head, sharp. She doesn’t remember anyone, beside her and Papa and the bad men. She’d never met anyone her own age before that raining night, and Mike and Dustin and Lucas. She didn’t even know kids like her existed, before the boys, before everything.

“Okay, thanks,” Max replies sadly.

Once more, Eleven wonders if she said something wrong, especially with the way Max lets go of her arm and moves to the other side of the room where Mike stands. She leans toward him and whispers something to his ear, to which he replies by squeezing her arm. Eleven has to turn around and look away, unable to deal with the feelings in her stomach and in her heart.

She moves to the kitchen, downs her glass of milk before she grabs a cookie. Nancy finds her here, worry in her eyes despite the smile on her lips, and leans against the fridge to face Eleven.

“Everything okay?”

“How do you call – when someone nice, but you don’t like them?”

Nancy’s smile turns into a little snort but it is Jonathan, appearing out of nowhere and towering over Nancy so he can grab something above the fridge, who replies. He doesn’t even look Eleven’s way when he pointedly says, “*Jealousy*,” then walks away.

Nancy points at him with her glass of water, as if to silently agree.

Jealousy.

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By the time Hopper decides that there is nothing more to be done for the day, and that they will meet again the following morning and move from there, it's already night. He shoves the boys' bikes in the back of his pick-up, and everyone says their last goodbyes before he drives Dustin, Lucas, and Max home. Jonathan agrees to drive Nancy and Mike home too, to make things easier, and the house gets a lot less noisy all of a sudden.

Joyce is showing Eleven the room where she'll spend the night – Will's, small and heavily decorated with bright posters – when Mike shows up in the doorframe, shy and awkward and asking if he can talk to Eleven in private. Joyce gives Eleven a look she doesn't understand, before she goes back to the living room and leave the two of them alone. Eleven sits on the bed. Mike doesn't move.

“You’re – okay, right? You’re fine and everything?” Eleven only nods her reply, not trusting her words for the moment. Mike sighs in relief, and offers her a smile. “Good. Good, yeah. I was – I thought – I’m glad you’re okay.”

He doesn't add anything, and they stay silent for long minutes, just staring at each other. He grew up since the last time they saw each other. Eleven hadn't really noticed before, but she does now for some reason – he's taller than her, if not by much, but still taller. His hair is the same, and so are his freckles, and his smile. She missed his smile the most, maybe.

“You and Max – boyfriends?”

“What?! No!” His eyes widen all of a sudden, and that's what finally sets him into motions, crossing the space between them in three big steps before he sits next to her on the bed. “Why would you think that?”

“Jealousy,” she echoes Jonathan's word from before. “She's pretty.”

Mike turns red once more, avoiding her eyes for a moment. Eleven's frown is lost on her features when he says, “Not as pretty as you.”

She can feel her own cheeks warming up, too, and has to look away. When Nancy says it, it is nice and it makes Eleven happy. When Mike

says it, it makes her stomach do funny things, and her heart beats faster, and her mind gets a little blurry. It's a weird combination of feelings, and Eleven will have to ask Nancy if it happens to her too, if this is why Jonathan is her boyfriend.

"Thank you," she replies in a whisper.

His hand finds hers on the mattress, his fingers linking with hers. His skin is warm and comforting, and she remembers holding his hand when they were running around, and leaning against him in the school's gymnasium, and his lips against her mouth. She smiles.

"Max is a friend. Just a friend," Mike explains. "You're more than that."

Her smile widens.